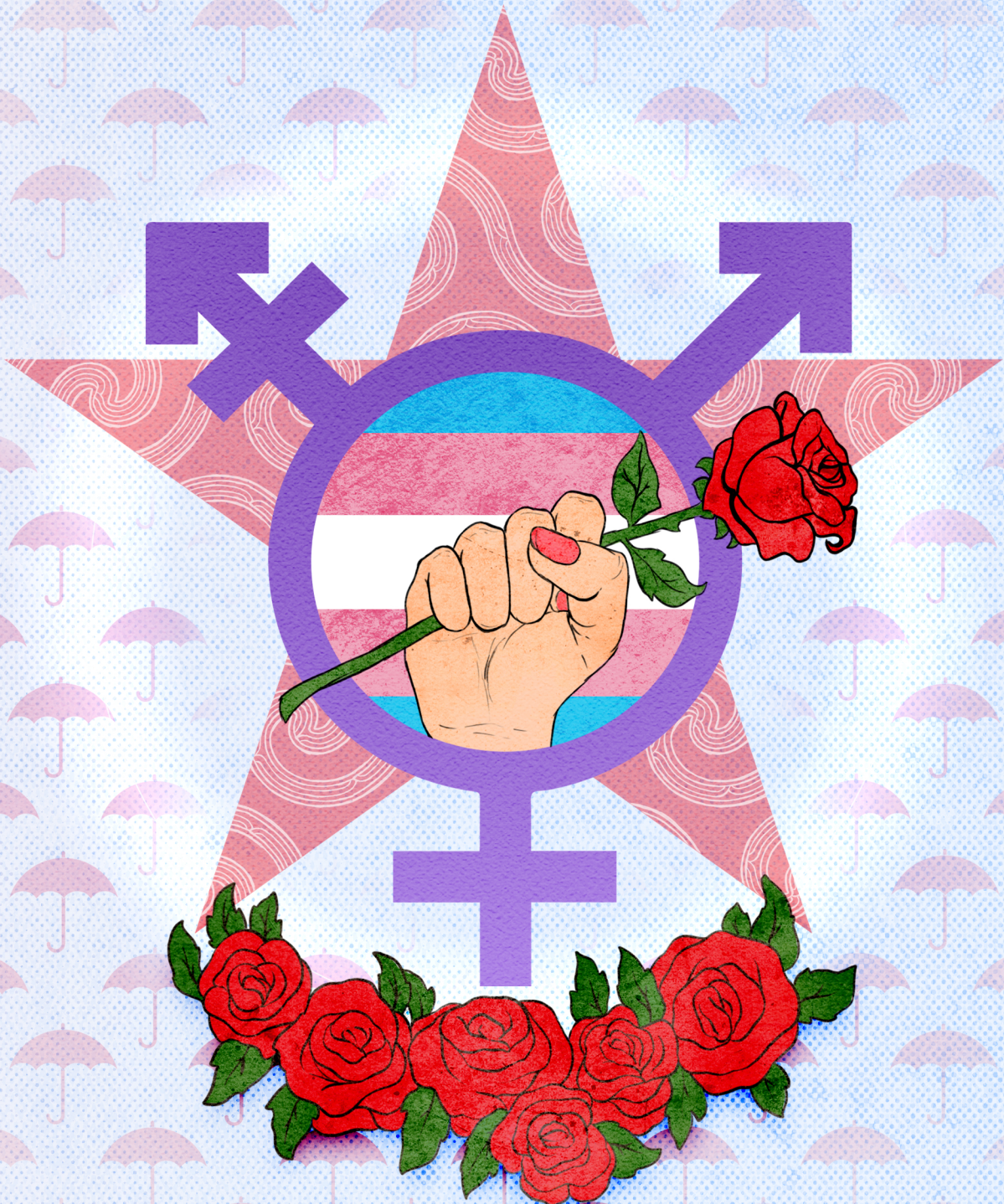


Fightback

Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism



SOCIALIST FEMINISM –
AGAINST TERF AND SWERF

Also available from

Fightback

Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism

Pamphlets



Magazine back issues

Issue 19: Women and Gender Minorities

Issue 20: International

Issue 21: Climate Change

Issue 22: Neo-Liberalism

Issue 23: Youth

Issue 24: Pasefika

Issue 25: Electoral Politics

Issue 26: Right to the City

Issue 27: Migrant and Refugee Rights

Issue 28: Electoral Politics and Racism

Issue 29: Fascism and Anti-Fascism

Issue 30: What is Capitalism?

Issue 31: Accessibility

Issue 32: Migrants and Refugees

Issue 33: International

Issue 34: Fighting Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism

Issue 35: Syria, Revolution and Counter-Revolution

All publications \$5 each + \$5 shipping and handling

(bundle of 5 publications \$15 inc. shipping and handling. All prices in NZ dollars.

Some items may no longer be available, so include contact details with order.)

Send your order to: fightback.australasia@gmail.com

Or: PO Box 10-282, Dominion Road, Auckland 1642, New Zealand

Quarterly magazine published by Fightback
ISSN: 1177-074, Vol. 6, No. 3, Issue 36
Co-ordinating Editor for this issue: Daphne Lawless

Editorial Board: Bronwen Beechey,
Gayaal Iddamagoda, Daphne Lawless, Joe McClure, Ani White, Victor Osprey
Design/Layout: Izzy Joy

Contact us at:

<http://fightback.org.nz>

Post: PO Box 10-282, Dominion Road,
Auckland 1164, New Zealand

Email: fightback.australasia@gmail.com

Phone: +64 272209552 (Aotearoa/New Zealand);
+61 4 345 39905 (Australia)

Subscriptions:

\$60 (AU/NZ) print

\$20 (AU/NZ) PDF/EPUB

CONTENTS

4

Editorial

5

Life After Stonewall: The Struggle Against TERFs and the Far-Right

SIGNÝ A

8

SWERF and TERF: The Red-Brown alliance in Policing Gender

DAPHNE LAWLESS

12

“The Face of Gayness”: A Trans History of Resis- tance in Aotearoa

WILL HANSEN

14

Why Do Socialists Care About Sex Workers?

JESSE DEKEL

15

Sex workers speak: we are workers

LUCY SKY & JUDY

17

Rights not rescue for migrant sex workers

LUCA STEVENSON

19

Willem Van Spronsen, activism, and domestic violence

ANNE RUSSELL

21

Fear of a Female Planet: Gen- der, Feminism, and Organized Working-Class Struggle Revis- ited

JASMINA BRANKOVIC

24

Neither femocrats nor fascists?

*Review of Feminism for the 99%: A
Manifesto by Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi
Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser*

DAPHNE LAWLESS

EDITORIAL

The concept of “intersectionality” – that various different forms of oppression and exploitation overlap and interact with each other – is hotly debated in Left activist circles. Many from the Marxist tradition oppose this concept; for them, the class struggle (capitalists against workers) is the single key to understanding society, and all other forms of oppression are secondary to that – including oppression on the basis of gender and sexuality.

Certainly, *Fightback* believes that the struggle for gender and sexual liberation can’t be won within capitalism. But we strongly oppose the idea that, because of this, gender and sexuality struggles are “secondary” to the class struggle – or even a distraction from it. This is because we agree with Karl Marx that the working class can *only* overthrow capitalism and bring about a new world through *universal solidarity*. Capitalism has survived so long because it continues to divide workers against each other, including on the basis of gender and sexuality. Therefore, a working class that is strong enough to defeat capitalism must overcome gender and sexual oppression *as part* of the revolutionary struggle, not telling those oppressed on this axis to “suck it up” for the good of The People – or, even worse, perpetuating that oppression in the movement itself.

These are not new arguments. The dialogue between socialism and feminism has been going on since before Marx and Engels, at least back to the days of Mary Woolstonecraft. In the 1980s, some feminists agreed with some Marxists that feminism and Marxism could not be combined. *Fightback* disagrees. But due to limited space, we decided to focus this issue of *Fightback* on Socialist Feminism on two major issues which are dividing the radical Left right now – transgender rights and sex work.

Fightback makes no bones about it. **Trans women are women** (in fact, everyone “is” the gender as which they identify) **and sex workers are workers**. As we will explore in this issue, we agree strongly with the anarcho-communist website *LibCom* that “feminists” who deny trans people their right to gender self-identification “are for all practical purposes, the women’s division of the global far-right”. We will show that “TERFs” who claim to be on the Left preach a form of politics which has much in common with the Right-populist and even fascist forces which are growing in strength around the world – and worse, that they often openly work with these forces of reaction.

We also believe that those who wish to abolish sex work show a lack of elementary solidarity with some of the most exploited and oppressed members of the working class. “SWERF” and “TERF” politics share the vital feature of attempting to police women’s bodies and the very concept of gender itself – no matter how

many actual women (and others) they hurt, exclude or “talk over” in the process. It is thus no accident that many socialists seem to have been sucked into anti-trans politics when trans sex workers didn’t want to listen to their anti-sex work politics. For this reason, we prioritised amplifying the voices of actual sex workers in this issue.

The last part of this issue canvasses some broader issues about what Socialist Feminism for the 21st century might mean. Part of the heritage of the actually-existing radical activist movement is, regrettably, a rather macho, misogynist culture which sometimes expresses it in some of the “best” male comrades acting abusively to women and others. This has been seen most strongly with overseas groups like the British SWP or the American ISO or PSL being torn apart by allegations that male members of the leadership sexually abused woman comrades, and that these crimes were covered up for “the good of the party”. Anne Russell’s article shows that these tendencies are present on the New Zealand left, while Jasmina Brankovic’s gives international context. We close with a review of a major recent book on what “Feminism for the 99%” – or Socialist Feminism – might mean for the global situation we currently face.

Daphne Lawless, coordinating editor

LIFE AFTER STONEWALL: THE STRUGGLE AGAINST TERFS AND THE FAR RIGHT

By SIGNÝ A. Reprinted with the kind permission of leftvoice.org.



A banner at “Camp Trans” outside the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival

Stonewall is one of the most famous episodes of modern queer history, but other important parts of queer history and queer struggle are far less well-known. Some of these, such as incidents of trans-exclusionary “feminist” aggression and the campaign to keep transition care from American trans people, continue to have a strong impact on queer struggle today. It has become a tactic of certain groups to co-opt the language of feminism and queer struggle in order to undermine them. These currents have found a friendly reception with the fascists now rising around the world, especially in the US and the UK. Trans women, especially Black and Latina trans women, continue to die in American jails, hospitals, and streets. American police continue to arrest trans women for simply existing in the world as trans.

Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminism

Trans-exclusionary radical feminists — not to be confused with radical feminists who are not bigoted against trans women — have a long history of bringing hateful, unscientific rhetoric and even physical violence to feminist spaces. Radical feminism asserts that the oppression of women is rooted in the patriarchy — the social forces that make cis men authority figures to whom all others must be subservient. TERFs often call themselves “gender critical”, arguing that gender (including gender expression and gender identity) does not actually exist aside from patriarchal social constructs. This includes the claim that trans people are one of these patriarchal social constructs. They push a view of sex that is so oversimplified and

reductive as to be scientifically inaccurate. In order to make clear the difference between the reactionary, exclusionary kind of radical feminist and those who are not bigoted, trans-exclusionary radical feminists have become known by an acronym of that long term — TERFs. This acronym was created by non-transgender radical feminists who did not want to be miscategorized as anti-trans.

In the 1970s, there was a radical feminist and lesbian separatist music collective called Olivia Records. One of their sound engineers was Sandy Stone, a trans woman. The collective knew she was trans and supported her as a woman and member of the collective, even helping her access transition healthcare. But certain reactionary elements made it their business to get rid of Stone. Despite a massive campaign of hate mail and death threats waged by these people, Olivia Records refused to abandon their trans member. The strategy behind this aggression was to get rid of trans people by attrition. Knowing that trans people are a vulnerable minority, the haters will often try to isolate us and keep us from any and all social, economic, and healthcare support. Before a concert in Seattle, Olivia Records received a death threat against Stone from a group of TERF reactionaries who called themselves Gorgons. Upon investigation, this was found to be a serious threat. But the collective was prepared and hired strong security for the concert. The reactionaries did indeed show up with guns, but the guards confiscated them.

In a similar incident, a cis woman at the 1973 Lesbian Conference was physically attacked by TERFs for standing between them and several trans women they intended to beat up. The conference had always been trans inclusive and voted to remain so after this incident. In 1993, at what became one of the most notoriously anti-trans events — the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival (MWMF), a survey run by a cis trans-inclusive radical feminist found that most attendees at the festival wanted trans women to be there. TERFs vandalized a stand educating attendees about trans women and threatened further violence if trans women were not all removed from the festival. In 1999, several Lesbian Avengers (a lesbian direct action group from that time) attended the MWMF with a 16 year-old trans girl in their group. A mob of TERFs surrounded them, yelling slurs. MWMF security officers pushed them into a tent where a large group of TERFs berated the young trans girl for hours. One threatened her with a knife.

In England in 2017, a TERF was recorded on video brutally manhandling a trans woman much smaller than herself. Purely on account of them being trans, the TERFs, the English media, and the police immediately painted these innocent trans women as the aggressors. This overwhelming media bias leads to trans people being denied justice and support when targeted by bigotry-motivated violence. It's also a kind of historical revisionism in the present day that socialists should oppose.

Entire websites exist where TERFs and members of the alt-right share private information about trans people so that others may take offline action with it, such as death threats and contacting employers to try to get trans people fired. These online hate sites have been linked to both trans deaths and the New Zealand mosque shootings.

Decades of Reactionary Misinformation

Reactionaries often claim that trans women are a threat to cis women merely by existing. This claim typically takes one of two forms. Sometimes they claim that trans women are biologically male and thus “really men”, presenting a threat to women’s safety, privacy, and comfort in women’s spaces. There is more than enough scientific evidence to refute that claim. The reactionaries almost never mention trans men being in men’s spaces, nor the effect of forcing men who happened to be assigned female into women’s spaces. They never acknowledge the existence of non-binary people either and only mention intersex people when attempting to use them to bludgeon trans women. It is of course possible for a person to be trans, non-binary, and intersex all at the same time. The other claim is a kind of lesser version of the first. Rather than going directly to “trans woman = man”, they will say that having women who they think look like men in women’s spaces will allow any actual men to get in and cause harm by pretending to be trans women. Obviously, men who intend harm have never needed to pretend to be anything other than men in order to commit and often get away with harm. TERFs ignore violence committed by women almost entirely. The truth is that human sex biology is far more complicated than a light switch. Science also does not exist in a vacuum. It can never supersede a human being’s right to interpret her/his/their own body for themselves, nor the right to exercise autonomy over it. The systemic violence under capitalism that often keeps trans people from bodily autonomy cannot change the fact that we still have the right to it.

In 1979, the notorious Janice Raymond published what is possibly the most blood-soaked book in modern queer history — *The Transsexual Empire*. It was a large hit piece on trans women. Many present-day anti-trans notions, such as trans women being a living stereotype, transition healthcare being cosmetic and experimental, and the idea of legislating trans

people out of existence, go back to this book. These anti-trans notions formed the basis for healthcare denial and many other forms of systemic and social discrimination that persist into the present. This kind of overwhelming oppression leads to suicides, medical negligence, and homelessness. It also encourages street violence.

While transmisogyny comes from many sources, much of the anti-trans misinformation currently seen can be linked back to TERF movements from the 1970s. The above-mentioned book is basically a condensed version of such. When the book was published, medical transition care was at least 50 years old. Raymond worked with the government at the time to define transition care as controversial, unethical, cosmetic, and not medically necessary. Shortly after publishing her book, she wrote a report for the National Center for Health Care Technology that included much of the same rhetoric. This led to an epidemic of trans healthcare denial in the US that continues into the present. Before that, US government policy followed the science and recognized transition healthcare as medically necessary for many trans people. Medicare covered transition healthcare before this for poor trans people in Minnesota (and possibly other states also), but Raymond and Reagan eliminated it in the 1980s.

Multiple professional healthcare organizations recognize transition care as medically necessary for those who need it, including the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, and the World Professional Association for Transgender Health. Some trans people do not require transition healthcare, but only the patient, in consultation with their qualified healthcare providers, can make that determination, not some cis academic with no knowledge of the relevant science. To this day, many American medical insurance plans continue to exclude transition care based on these debunked claims, even though such exclusion is now illegal under the Affordable Care Act and some state and local laws. A number of countries with universal healthcare systems have long covered transition care, including Canada, Sweden, and the UK. Shortly after the Russian Revolution, the USSR sent some of its healthcare professionals to Berlin to learn about LGBT healthcare from the Institute for Sexual Research.

The Erasure of Queer History and the Silencing of Trans Voices

The only reason that anyone could believe that transition healthcare was experimental or that trans people didn’t exist until recently is the erasure of much of the queer history and medical research from prior decades. This erasure began with the destruction of the Institute for Sexual Research in Berlin in May of 1933 by a large mob of fascists. It became the most famous book burning of WWII history. Many of those books were on LGBT+ health and wellness, including

texts on trans-specific biology and medical procedures. With the stronghold of gay and trans rights in Germany destroyed, the Nazis put LGBT people into the same death camps as Jewish people, Roma people, communists, and others. Gay and trans people in these camps were labelled with a pink triangle and were often treated the worst of all prisoners. They suffered rape, medical experimentation, and even sadistic murder for the amusement of the Nazi guards. American and English soldiers who later encountered these camps freed everyone except for the prisoners with a pink triangle. Instead, many of the gay people were put back in prison. The Soviet Army freed everyone in the camps they liberated, including gay and trans people.

Even now, the erasure of queer and trans history and the suppression of trans voices continues. Certain parties will use collections of throw-away social media accounts to mass report trans people for bogus claims as an attempt to silence and isolate them. Killings of trans people continue to be underreported, especially in healthcare settings. Some of this is due to misgendering in media and police reports. From grade school up to medical school, education on trans people and issues is often flimsy, inaccurate, or simply absent.

TERFs and the Far Right

Many prominent trans-exclusionary pseudo-feminists receive support from and have ideological similarities to another group that might seem directly opposed to them: far-right Christians. One self-described radical feminist related an account of taking a political trip with a known English TERF that ended up turning into a meeting with rich anti-abortion elements in the US. The trip also appears to have been funded by an American far-right organization, none of which was known to this particular woman ahead of time. It can be gleaned from instances like this that trans-exclusionary reactionaries often have no problem collaborating with and accepting funds from powerful far-right groups that fight against women's rights, nor with manipulating and lying in the service of their obsessive hatred of trans people. The link between TERFs and the far-right is also described elsewhere.¹

One particular TERF group, the "Women's Liberation Front (WoLF)", sent at least one member to lobby against the Equality Act, which would make sexual orientation and gender identity protected characteristics under federal law. Despite the name, most of WoLF's activities appear to be not fighting for the liberation of all women but attacking those women who happened to be assigned male at birth. This includes

suing the Obama Administration to try to keep trans students from safe bathroom access. How does a fringe TERF group get the resources for such activities? From bourgeois far-right organizations such as the "Alliance Defending Freedom", which has given WoLF at least \$15,000. Both of these groups worked together to try to keep trans people out of homeless shelters, which the Trump regime has now joined in on.

While some might use the term "political lesbian" to mean a lesbian who is politically active, some TERFs use it to mean "lesbian only for political reasons." They claim to be lesbian because they do not have sex with men as a way of rebelling against patriarchy.

Some of them see this as celibacy, since they do not consider anything but cishetero intercourse to be actual sex. This perspective is not original to them. It comes from Christian fundamentalism, which also considers only intercourse between a cis man and a cis woman to be actual sex.

When examined, their "gender critical" TERFs platform falls apart. They do not want gender neutral bathrooms, and they are against gender neutral pronouns. Despite study after study showing the biological, social, cultural, and historical legitimacy of trans people, these pseudo-feminist reactionaries continue to throw their reductive, high-school level understanding of biology at trans people in vain but nonetheless harmful attempts to delegitimize them. Their rhetoric is directly opposed to one of the core ideas of feminism — that women are more than just a collection of body parts.

In the struggle against imperialism and exploitation, it is critical to look not only at economic class but also all other divisions in society. Transphobia and transmisogyny, homophobia, sexism, and racism are among many ideological weapons that the bourgeoisie uses against the proletariat. That is why effective revolutionary practice must necessarily be inclusive and feminist. As shown in this article, reactionaries will sometimes claim the mantle of feminism as a cover for divisive and oppressive attacks against some of the most marginalized people. They do this to divide and subvert the cause of liberation and must therefore be opposed just as strongly as the fascists, the corporate bosses, and the brutal officers of the state.

¹ For example, <https://jezebel.com/the-unholy-alliance-of-trans-exclusionary-radical-femin-1834120309>; <https://www.politicalresearch.org/2016/08/11/the-christian-rights-love-affair-with-anti-trans-feminists/>

SWERF AND TERF:

THE RED-BROWN ALLIANCE IN POLICING GENDER

By DAPHNE LAWLESS

Late last year, a veteran of communist politics in Aotearoa/New Zealand decided to contribute to a march for the traditional working-class demand for reproductive rights by standing outside it with a sign bearing only the words “WOMAN = ADULT HUMAN FEMALE” – a dogwhistle for anti-trans feminists (or “trans-excluding radical feminists”, TERFs). Another veteran from the same organisation now has the same phrase at the head of her Twitter biography – displacing all mention of her record as a socialist and a union organiser. And they’re not the only ones. How has the motivation to punch down on trans people – and defend the “free speech” of fascists and others who do so – come to substitute for the fight for workers’ power and a post-capitalist world in the minds of veteran activists?

Freeze peach

Daphna Whitmore and Don Franks are veteran socialists and union organisers, who were founding authors of the blog *Redline* when it was set up in 2012¹. Whitmore’s Twitter account identifies her as part of the “Left Network for Free Speech” (LNFS). The *Redline* post in which this “Network” was announced says:

As partisans of the working class, we know that the working class has historically been denied democratic rights, including free speech. Even after hundreds of years of struggle, workers today face being fired for expressing, in their own time and on their own computers, views which their employers disapprove of.

Leaving the power to decide what is acceptable speech in the hands of employers and the state disempowers workers and oppressed sections of society such as women, Maori, gay people and migrant workers... Free speech is necessary to expose racism, sexism and bigotry. In contrast, ‘hate speech’ restrictions don’t challenge these ideas. ‘Hate speech’ laws in practice are an arbitrary tool that are used to impose social regulation.

They can be used to silence progressives on a range of issues.²

Given their defence of free speech as a weapon in defence of the interests of workers and gay people, it is strange that almost all the articles posted by the LNFS on their Facebook page since it was founded are in defence of Israel Folau – the millionaire athlete who was released from his contract with the Australian Rugby Union after violating his contract by making religiously-based homophobic social media posts – or of “gender-critical” (i.e. transphobic) commentators and academics. The link between these and working-class activism seems thin, to say the least.

Free-speech absolutism on the Left has had a historical record of degenerating, first into tolerance for Right-wing ideas, then actual sympathy with them. The classic historical example of this is the Revolutionary Communist Party in Britain, originally a split from the Socialist Workers Party. This organisation – always somewhat of an outlier on the British far-left – began to be distinguished in the mid-1980s by opposing the consensus that fascist movements such as the British National Party should not be given platforms on campus. This clearly prefigures the LNFS’ insistence that state action against “hate speech” in fact makes things worse, as well as its concern about “academic mobbing” of professors who promote transphobia.

The subsequent transformation of the RCP into an outright Right-wing libertarian outfit is quite notorious. Opposing the liberal consensus had become for them an end in itself, detached from socialist principle. The organisation itself wound up in the 1990s, as their *Living Marxism* magazine was sued out of existence for denial of the horrors of attempted genocide during the Yugoslav civil wars. They cropped up later in the form of the “Institute of Ideas”, promoting climate-change denial through documentaries such as *The Great Global Warming Swindle*. They continue to exist as *Spiked*, a libertarian Right-wing website funded by American billionaires the Koch brothers, some of whose writers have recently been elected to

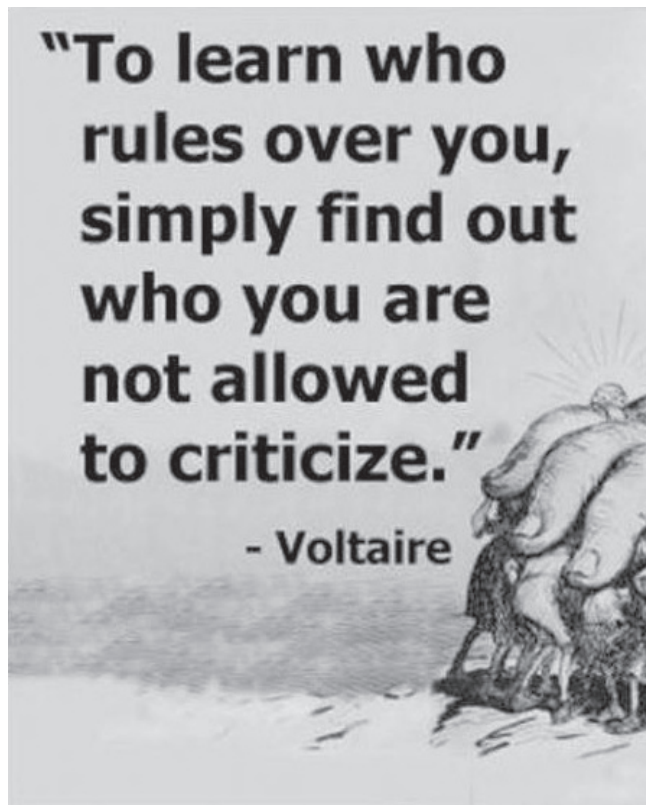
1 The founders of Redline were former members of the Workers Party of New Zealand – the organisation from which Fightback is also descended. We are aware of the historical ironies involved.

2 <https://rdln.wordpress.com/2019/05/15/left-network-for-free-speech/>. For refutations from the Left of the case against hate-speech restrictions, see Max Rashbrooke at Overland (liberal – <https://overland.org.au/previous-issues/issue-219/feature-max-rashbrooke/>) and R. Totale at LibCom (anarcho-communist – <https://libcom.org/blog/freedom-speech-libertarian-perspective-03072019>)

the European Parliament for the Brexit Party.³

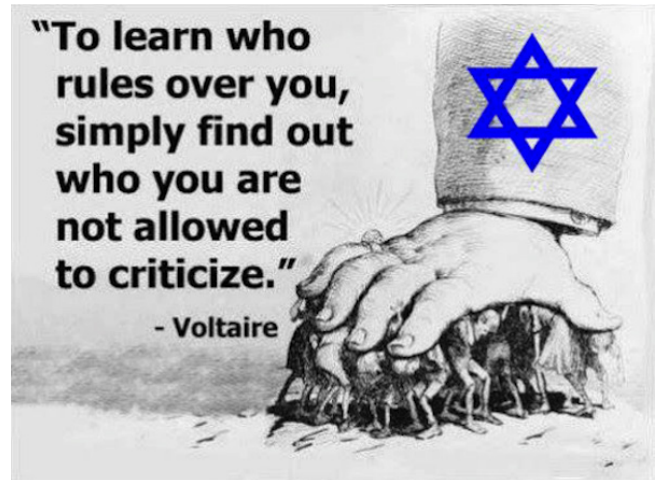
It is interesting to note that the place where this degeneration began – minimising the threat of fascism in favour of the supposed greater threat of liberal “thought policing” – is a very common trope on the anti-liberal Left, the kind of people whom *Fightback* has criticised in our previous articles on Conservative Left and Red-Brown tendencies. As we have previously stated, this kind of underestimation of the fascist threat – or even seeing fascist movements as having a positive side, in mobilising opposition to a centrist/liberal consensus – was the kind of thinking from Communists which led to the victory of Hitler in Germany.

The most shocking and disturbing thing on the LNFS Facebook page, however, is the un-ironic posting of this image⁴:



This is an extremely common meme in online “free speech” circles (and was recently quoted by none other than Donald Trump Jr. on Twitter). But this is not a quote from the 18th century French writer Voltaire at all. It is in fact a quote from Kevin Alfred

Strom, an American neo-Nazi writing in 1993⁵. The clue to whom he was really referring is given in the following, full version of the meme:



There is no reason to believe that Whitmore, Franks et al. were aware of the true nasty nature of this meme. But in a way, that makes it even worse. *Fightback* has previously characterised the spread of “Red-Brown” ideas as like a “zombie plague”, in that socialists or others on the Left who start descending into Right-populist or even fascist politics don’t even realise that they’re doing so. It is a case of losing one’s political (or even moral) compass.

“Progressive” transphobia

Unfortunately, trans-exclusive ideas are not confined to the comrades of *Redline*/LNFS. TERF politics are very strong on the British left, and one union activist recently arrived from Britain tried earlier this year to defend the free speech of transphobes on the “Unions NZ” Facebook group.⁶ Prominent veterans of the socialist movement in New Zealand – such as Unite Union stalwart Mike Treen and retired academic David Bedggood⁷ – have also made social media or blog posts opposing “transactivism” or defending local anti-trans activists such as Renee Gerlich. Such comrades often try to justify themselves by arguing that they are against discrimination against trans people, *but* that “transactivism/the transgender movement” goes too far. These are not dissimilar in form from the arguments against Gay Liberation from 1970s Communists, which are still used by fringe Stalinist groups like the “Communist Party of Great

3 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Living_Marxism, <https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Spiked>, and <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/dec/07/us-billionaires-hard-right-britain-spiked-magazine-charles-david-koch-foundation>

4 <https://www.facebook.com/579934379168679/photos/a.582606685568115/582606648901452/>, accessed July 13, 2019.

5 <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/nov/27/cory-bernardi-mistakenly-quotes-voltaire-on-twitter-with-supposed-neo-nazis-line>

6 This post raised strong negative feedback and has since been deleted by the group administrators.

7 Treen has republished several anti-“transactivist” articles on social media, including those from *Redline*. Bedggood is the author of this blog post: <https://situationsvacant.blog/2019/02/17/why-are-transactivists-hostile-to-radical-feminists/>

Britain (Marxist-Leninist)".⁸

This is particularly ironic in an era where some of the staunchest young communists in Aotearoa/New Zealand identify as trans, non-binary or in some other way "genderqueer".⁹ As we noted in "Against Conservative Leftism",¹⁰ incomprehension of new ways of living which have become common among young people in the era of neoliberal globalisation is a common feature among many veteran activists.

Beyond that, many activists have pointed to an extremely strong link between anti-sex-worker (sex-worker-exclusive radical feminism, or SWERF) and anti-trans politics. English sociology professor Sally Hines put it like this on Twitter:

If someone is a trans exclusionary feminist they will almost certainly have anti-sex work and anti-porn politics – and vice versa. The constant is a denial of body autonomy and a feminism that insists it knows what is best for other women (even when told otherwise).¹¹

It is no coincidence that, due to social exclusion from other work, trans women have been disproportionately represented among sex workers. It is rumoured that several prominent TERFs in New Zealand developed their hostility to trans people after getting a hostile response to their anti-sex worker activism.

English trans musician "DeadBitBabe" also comments:

SWERF'N'TERFS can't acknowledge the autonomy of sex workers because to them power only comes from maintaining the integrity of their fantasy construction of a female body... Are the cries of Lesbian erasure not strangely reminiscent of the fascist's cries of white genocide?¹²

The "lesbian erasure" trope is an interesting one. The *AfterEllen* website recently published an article entitled "A Butch Eradication, Served With a Progressive

8 <https://www.cpgb-ml.org/2018/12/07/news/identity-politics-are-anti-marxian-and-a-harmful-diversion-from-the-class-struggle/>

9 Not to even mention the contribution to the Communist movement over decades by "transactivists" such as the late Les Feinberg: see <https://www.lesliefleinberg.net/>.

10 Published in *Fightback* 22 (March 2016); republished in *What is Conservative Leftism?*, both available from <http://www.fightback.org.nz>; online at <https://fightback.org.nz/2016/02/15/against-conservative-leftism/>

11 https://twitter.com/sally_hines/status/1142370626356858881. Hines even suggests that SWERFs and TERFs might be brought together under the label "Genital-Obsessed Feminists".

12 <https://twitter.com/deadbitbabe/status/1016244936453316608>

Smile", claiming that the network of lesbian spaces and business which had been built up since the 1980s had collapsed due to an increasing tendency of "butch" (masculine-appearing) lesbians to identify as trans men. The author laments:

Our lesbian spaces are already dead. Our bookstores, our dances. Everything we built is dead and taken over by the trans nightmare.¹³

If nothing else, this is a change from the usual TERF narrative, which tends to ignore the existence of trans men and non-binary people altogether, and instead to whip up moral panic about trans women "colonizing" or even "raping" cis women's spaces. What should really make people stop and think about both these TERF narratives is how similarly they resemble fascist narratives about "The Great Replacement", as made notorious by the manifesto of the terrorist who murdered 51 Muslims at prayer in Christchurch earlier this year.¹⁴

Following the analysis of Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky, *Fightback* has previously argued that fascist politics everywhere can be characterised as a movement led by the insecure and frightened middle-class.¹⁵ People who may have worked hard to build a little privilege for themselves under capitalism become terrified that an ethnic or cultural Other (classically, "the Jews") might take it away from them. The *AfterEllen* article quoted above mourns for the death of a network of lesbian/woman-identified *small businesses*. In most cases TERFs tend to be older, whiter feminists who have had some success in academia, writing, or in the bourgeois lesbian community (the most globally prominent example being Germaine Greer).

Analysing TERF politics as a variety of fascist ideology might seem shocking or over-the-top; particularly because to do so would require us to categorize many veteran socialists in Aotearoa/New Zealand to have slipped over into the "Red-Brown" camp. But defining fascism as a movement in defence of the threatened privilege of the downwardly mobile middle class seems to make the parallel unavoidable. As does the habit of TERF ideologues of suggesting that trans people are part of some kind of conspiracy of "elites", as in the tweet reproduced below:



Nina West@eternalechoes
@jan_olier

Follow

Replying to @BJFrith @ramendik and 7 others

The real root of problems can be found in the elites backing the trans movement. Ask yourself how has the trans movement become so powerful so quickly - threatening the safety and livelihoods of middle class academics, politicians, researchers and scientists.

10:41 am - 18 Jul 2018



The full antisemitic force of that term “elites” can be grasped when you read a transphobic academic explicitly name George Soros, the Jewish liberal billionaire who has become a common bad guy in fascist conspiracy theory, as a guilty party.¹⁶ “Deadbitbabe” on Twitter again:

Real talk: the primordially whole female body is to TERFs what the primordially whole nation and its people is to fascists... A mythological fantasy that serves to displace all sorts of anxieties.¹⁷

The anarchist-communist website *LibCom* puts it more bluntly: “Transphobic feminists are, for all practical purposes, the women’s division of the global far-right.”¹⁸ Given this, the support given by the fascist and religious-fundamentalist Right for TERFs, described in other articles reprinted in this issue, begins to look less like an “enemy’s enemy” situation and more like a meeting of ideological bedfellows.

Perhaps the final word can be left to the author of the blog *nothingiseverlost*, in a criticism of the similar descent of the socialist-feminist academic Nina Power into TERF and other forms of right-wing politics: “you never seem to get people becoming *less* sympathetic to the far-right at the same time as getting into “gender critical”/trans-exclusionary versions of feminism.”¹⁹ It is extremely interesting that Power’s main move in defending her dabbling with transphobic and fascist memes is an invocation of ... free speech.

What is to be done?

Fightback has previously discussed what we see as another irruption of Right-wing ideology into socialist circles, here and elsewhere in the Western world – the demonization of the Syrian revolution. The repetitive argument from such people is that the Syrian people fighting against the Assad regime and its Russian allies are not “real” subjects of liberation (such as, to take a more popular example, the Palestinian people), but instead pawns of some Zionist-jihadi-US State Department conspiracy against Syria’s “national sovereignty”. The really perverse issue is that some of

the TERF-adjacent leftists we have quoted – and we might name David Bedggood here – have agreed with us in staunchly rejecting this dehumanizing rhetoric when used against the Syrian people in struggle... only to use similar rhetoric against trans people in struggle.²⁰

At the very least, what this can tell us is that “it’s difficult to be right about everything”. But it also warns us against a *sectarian* response to SWERF/TERF ideas on the Left – that is, refusal to deal with anyone who might hold such views at the moment. We all live under a suffocating blanket of capitalist ideology, in which it becomes “natural” for different groups of the oppressed to be suspicious or hostile towards each other. Even with the best intentions, it can be very hard to *consistently* hold to a materialist analysis which can clearly identify patterns of oppression, exploitation and privilege, and not be confused by the “DARVO” (“Deny, Attack, and Reverse Victim and Offender”) tactics habitually used by fascist movements and domestic abusers.²¹

Fightback believes that to effectively fight capitalism today means to fight fascism, the most dangerous form of capitalist ideology, which is currently on the rise. To fight fascism, we must have a united front of working and oppressed people. To have a united front we cannot tolerate racism, misogyny, transphobia, xenophobia, Islamophobia, state-worship or any other ideology which suggests that some oppressed people are “deserving targets” within our united front, because that is literally the thin edge of the Fascist wedge.

The Left has had far too much *opportunism* recently – refusal to face Right-populist or even fascist ideas within the movements for fear of alienating people, of breaking up the mass movement. We need to hold to a practice of honest, sharp criticism of SWERF and TERF ideas where-ever they are raised, even by “comrades” or “good Leftists”, as contrary to the unity of all the oppressed we need to build a better world. We also need to centre the experiences of trans people and sex workers within our movement in such debates – nothing should be “about them, without them”.

At the same time, it is crucial to build the biggest possible anti-fascist, anti-capitalist united front – which will mean sometimes linking arms with SWERFs, TERFs and even partisans of Bashar al-Assad against a common enemy. No-one said it was going to be easy.

Special thanks to Sage Anastasi, Lisandru Grigorut and Anne Russell for their help with this article.

13 <https://www.afterellen.com/general-news/569661-a-butch-eradication-served-with-a-progressive-smile>

14 https://paparoots.org/secure/great_replacement/

15 <https://fightback.org.nz/2018/05/26/what-is-fascism-an-introduction/>

16 <https://4thwavenow.com/2018/05/25/the-open-society-foundations-the-transgender-movement/>

17 <https://twitter.com/deadbitbabe/status/1016241998678908928>

18 <https://twitter.com/libcomorg/status/1128654226610098177>

19 <https://nothingiseverlost.wordpress.com/2019/06/27/whats-yr-take-on-evola-some-very-late-words-on-nina-powers-recent-stances/>

20 An excellent article on LibCom shows how a Red-Brown conference in Sweden brought together transphobic speakers with some of the most notorious defenders of Assad, such as Eva Bartlett and Vanessa Beeley: <https://libcom.org/blog/bonzo-goes-oslo-christian-fundamentalists-far-right-strike-new-pose-26022019>

21 <https://dynamic.uoregon.edu/jjf/defineDARVO.html>

"THE FACE OF GAYNESS":

A TRANS HISTORY OF RESISTANCE IN AOTEAROA

WILL HANSEN is a Master's candidate in history at Victoria University of Wellington and trustee of the Lesbian and Gay Archives of New Zealand. His Master's thesis, an extension of his honours thesis, is about trans politics and communities in Aotearoa in the 1970s and 80s.

Aotearoa has never had a "Stonewall moment." That boisterous blast of radical collective action at the Stonewall Inn in 1969, led by trans women and other queers of colour, sex workers, homeless street youth, and others, has achieved the status of legend in queer history. Although Stonewall was not "the beginning of queer liberation" that it is often made out to be, its importance as a symbolic moment that has been utilised by activists to push queer politics in a radical direction, and remind the community of how much we do truly owe trans women of colour and other marginalised queer communities, cannot be understated.

However, in Aotearoa, we never had such a moment. And when queer activists here attempt to utilise Stonewall in the same way, it has much less power. There is a perception that in Aotearoa, queer rights were fought for and won solely by lesbian and gay activists. Trans people were not at the forefront of *our* politics, no matter how important they may have been overseas.

This is a gross misconception.

Trans women, particularly trans women of colour engaged in sex work, have always been the face of our movement, regardless of whether cisgender lesbians and gays have accepted them. Speaking to oral historian Caren Wilton, Dana de Milo articulated that trans women were "the bottom of the gay heap, even though we were the face of it." While the "white gay guys" could hide behind men's clothing, trans women did not have this option. Although we often speak of "homophobic" violence, scholar Viviane K. Namaste argues that "the connotations of the pejorative names used against individuals who are assaulted – names like "sissy," "faggot," "dyke"...suggest an attack is justified not in reaction to one's sexual identity, but to one's gender presentation."¹ Gender and sexuality is collapsed, and it is *non-normative gender presentation*, rather than *sexuality*, which is used by attackers to identify which 'queers' to bash. This is why trans women like de Milo, most likely to be singled out for transgressing gender norms, "were the face of gayness, even though we weren't gay...we were the ones

who were getting beaten up and put in jail."² Queens (as such women generally preferred to be identified) were situated at the intersection of a complex network of oppressions; this system of gender violence is both classed and racialised. De Milo and her contemporaries were not only "the face of gayness" and most vulnerable to assault because they were trans, but also because they were sex workers, and the majority were also Māori and Pasifika. They defied convention on account of their gender, their sexual practice, their class and precarity, and their race.

Additionally, queens were not simply a racialised minority, but a *colonised* minority. Sex, gender and sexuality are used to reify colonial power, to naturalise hierarchies and unequal gender relations, and therefore heterosexism and transmisogyny must be interpreted as colonial systems of violence.³ Steve Pile and Michael Keith argue that because "power colonises internally as well as externally" – that is, oppressed populations are encouraged to internalise the belief that they are worthy of oppression – "shedding the guilt and shame induced by internal colonisation," while less obvious than the overthrow of external power, is just as crucial a means of resistance.⁴ As scholar and activist Elizabeth Kerekere writes, since "discrimination against takatāpui has been normalised in the context of colonisation... claiming takatāpui identity can be seen as a means of decolonising diverse gender identities, sexualities and sex characteristics."⁵ While in the 1970s and early 80s, these women did not claim "takatāpui" identity explicitly, many nonetheless drew on their cultural heritage for strength in claiming their identity proudly as queens.⁶ These women had to combat not only

1 Viviane K. Namaste, *Invisible Lives: the Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p.140

2 Dana de Milo in Caren Wilton, *My body, my business: New Zealand sex workers in an era of change* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2018), pp.184-185

3 Chris Finley, "Decolonizing the Queer Native Body (and recovering the Native Bull-Dyke): Bringing "Sexy Back" and Out of Native Studies' Closet," in *Queer Indigenous Studies: critical interventions in theory, politics, and literature* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011) p.32

4 Steve Pile and Michael Keith, *Geographies of Resistance* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.24

5 Elizabeth Kerekere, 'Part of The Whānau: The Emergence of Takatāpui Identity – He Whāriki Takatāpui,' doctorate thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2017, p.128

6 See Georgina Beyer in Jessica Hutchings and Clive Aspin,



From Pink Triangle 54 (July/August 1985). Reproduced by kind permission of the Lesbian and Gay Archives of New Zealand.

external oppression, but internalised transphobia too; in this context, the simple act of walking down the street, proud to be oneself, was an act of extraordinary power.

From Carmen to Chrissy Witoko, Wellington's queens in particular were also actively carving out queer spaces in otherwise hostile queerphobic and cissexist terrain. Again, while such work may not look as dynamic as a protest (which trans people were also involved in, see the photograph attached), building space for community was a vital component in allowing queer people to survive and thrive. Indeed, Witoko's Evergreen Coffee Lounge became in the 1980s a drop-in centre for lesbians and gays and sex workers alike, providing direct support to both rights movements. Before there can be mobilisation of marginalised community, the marginalised must come together *as* a community first. Also speaking to Wilton, Poppy explained how queens "stuck together," because "no one else is going to stand up for us. Nobody. You walk down Queen Street, and if they realise you're not a girl, you'll get punched in the street. And when you call a policeman, he'll abuse you too. I'm proud of it. We were tough girls. The 1960s was a tough world, you know?"⁷ Given that systematic and

internalised cissexism and transmisogyny pressured trans people into isolation and silence, the very act of seeking trans friendships and community should be interpreted as resistance.

There is no space in this piece to outline all that trans people have done to achieve liberation in Aotearoa.

Although trans people should not have had to have done *anything* in order to warrant respect and celebration, the point is, we *were* there, and we *were* resisting. Resistance takes as many different forms as does oppression, and just because it may not be as immediately recognisable as a change to the law or a protest placard, does not mean it did not help push forward change.

For more international context on the role of trans people in radical and queer politics over the last 50 years, see <https://communemag.com/fifty-years-of-queer-insurgency>

Sexuality and the Stories of Indigenous People (Wellington: Huia, 2007), pp.71, 74-74; Poppy in Wilton, p.272; Resitara Apa in Dan McMullin and Yuki Kihara, *Samoan Queer Lives* (Auckland: little island press, 2018), pp.27-28

7 Poppy in Wilton, p.272

WHY DO SOCIALISTS CARE ABOUT SEX WORKERS?

By JESSE DEKEL and the Socialist Feminism committee of the Democratic Socialists of America, San Francisco chapter. Originally published as a zine.

Why do feminist socialists care about sex workers?

As socialist feminists, we believe that all workers deserve dignity! There is no reason sex work is any different from any other type of labour when you strip away oppressive patriarchal standards of morality.

Isn't sex work bad for the people in it?

Under capitalism all jobs are bad for workers. Bosses make money off of our labour and give us as little payment, benefits, and respect as they can get away with. As socialists we stand against the exploitation of ALL workers against bosses, exploited by conditions outside and inside their work. We support sex workers founding unions and collectives to advocate for better working conditions, and the empowerment of the workers themselves.

Fight the stigma

Due to a puritanical culture, sex workers face stigma at every turn. There is a racist, homophobic, transphobic, ableist, gendered and anti-Semitic history to this stigma, which informs the present of policing/prisons and economic marginalization. Society devalues and takes away agency from sex workers to make decisions about their economic livelihood. Most of all, it makes it even harder for the marginalized to survive. If we want to be a true supporter of marginalized workers, then we have to support sex workers.

Why decriminalization?

Sex workers are overwhelmingly asking for the decriminalization, and not regulation/legalization of their work. Decriminalization prohibits the state and law enforcement officials from intervening in sex work. Decriminalization also de-prioritizes arrests, reduces interaction between police and sex workers, and retroactively seals criminal records.

Why is the legalization model not enough?

Legalization would simply allow for a capitalist exploitation of sex work, with all of its attendant regulations and coercions. We've seen this with the legalization of marijuana: instead of simply reducing law enforcement's presence in the drug war, it's turned into a system that benefits only the privileged and continues incarcerating and otherwise exploiting the marginalized. As socialists, we reject the further entrenchment of capitalist enterprise within sex work.

SEX WORKERS SPEAK: WE ARE WORKERS

Testimonies from people doing sex work in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

1. LUCY SKY

In a capitalist society, all labour is exploitative; to treat sex work as any different to manual labour is reductive and discriminatory. SWERFs (Sex Worker Exclusionary Radical Feminists) often use a rhetoric that sex work is “selling your body”. This lacks any nuance, or critique that under capitalism *all* labour is commodified and is therefore “selling your body”.

A manual labourer is required to engage in physical labour in order to survive; sex workers are no different in that regard. The commodification of the body is a systemic issue under capitalism, and needs to be addressed as a whole, not just when it comes to those who are most marginalised, such as sex workers.

This marginalisation however causes sex workers to face exploitation in very unique intersections, those that a general labourer may not face. Drug use, poverty, racism, gender discrimination and other intersections can all exclude sex workers from engaging in “normal” or “acceptable” labour, as defined by the status quo.

To give a personal viewpoint, I engaged in sex work to sustain a drug habit; a drug habit that precluded me from working due to pervasive drug testing attitudes in New Zealand. This drug habit wasn't a leisure activity, it was formed out of an aversion to trauma: sexual, emotional, and derived from poverty.

This drug habit took primacy above my own safety, and I was re-traumatised over and over again by engaging in sex work. However, sex work is not the issue in my situation. It was a means to survive in the face of a welfare system that didn't provide support, mental health systems that didn't provide support, and communities that were happy to turn a blind eye to the marginalised population.

I felt hopeless, and that there was no escape. There were no systems in place that would humanise me or treat me with the respect I desperately needed.

Sex workers, just as any human, are required to engage in the coercive system that capitalism has created in order to survive. They (we) shouldn't face further alienation from their communities for engaging in the same activities that are required of any human to survive.

Sex workers deserve the same protections and rights that any labourer deserves, as sex work is work. As one of the most marginalised populations, perhaps these protections and rights need in fact to be given even more primacy.

2. JUDY

I'm a transgender sex worker. People have lots of other names for me, it almost seems there's an approved list of them. I have my favourites from the list: “scarlet lady” and “coquet”. But one of those words is the one most commonly associated with sex workers, whore.

I proudly call myself a whore. Most of my friends hate me doing so, they see it as most people do: a horrible insult meaning you're the most degraded thing a woman can be. But when you look at the word whore, where it comes from, what it actually means, you find something very interesting.

“Whore” started out in the 16th century as a polite euphemism for another word for sex worker we've now lost. When you strip it right down, whore just means sex worker. Thing is, the reason it no longer means that is we don't like acknowledging sex work is just that: work, just like being a plumber or carpenter, no difference really.

So I'm a whore, a sex worker. And I'm proud of being one. More than that, when someone throws whore at me as an insult, I can just smile, say “yes I am”, and let the insult bounce. That's the thing about being a sex worker, people don't like accepting you are a worker. You're either some kind of moral degenerate or a fallen woman who needs to be saved. Either way you have no say in your life, other people know far better than you what to do with your life. You're a child who can't be trusted to make your own decisions about what you do.

Oddly enough, I feel quite capable of making my own decisions about my life. Before I was a sex worker I had a variety of jobs, including manager of a graphic arts department in a printing firm. Not only did people trust me to make decisions about my own life then, they trusted me to make decisions about other people's lives. I really don't think my mental capacity has diminished since then.

People of course will argue I must have been forced into sex work by desperate circumstances. No, not at all. I'm a sex worker due to a conscious, logical choice. I could work 60 to 70 hours a week in a supposedly “respectable” job, or earn the same money working five to eight hours a week. A no-brainer, really.

Then we get the argument, there's no skill involved in my job. It's easy money, all you do is lay back and “think of England” (or whichever country takes your fancy). Nothing could be further from the truth. In my previous employment as a department manager I developed a wide and varied skill set. Time man-

agement, interpersonal relations, financial control, conflict resolution, understanding clients' needs; the list is really quite extensive. And I use every single one of those skills extensively as a sex worker. More than that, I've extended and sharpened those skills.

It's a damn sight harder being a sex worker than managing a group of graphic artists. It's not easy money and there's a hell of a lot of skill involved and in areas you'd never expect. I often tell people the most useful parts of my body as a sex worker are my ears and my vocal cords, listening to my clients and communicating effectively with them. You really can't do this job if you can't do that.

So, sex work is work. Really honest to goodness old fashioned hard decent labour. And like any other worker, a carpenter, lawyer, plumber, doctor, whatever, we deserve respect for what we do. We deserve protection from harm. Yes, the job involves risk, but to be honest, there are riskier jobs: nursing springs to mind. We deserve protection from exploitation. Biggest step in that was decriminalisation. We now have access to all the legal protections any other worker has in their employment. Sex work is hard work, it can often be very draining. It requires a wide, varied and unique skill set, one I don't think you'll find replicated in any other job. It can also be immensely rewarding; I get to meet a huge variety of people and get to know them on an incredibly intimate level.

Sex work is real work, and those who choose of their own free will to engage in it deserve to be respected and treated as any other worker might be.



dr. phoenix calida is bearylly black
@uppittynegress



The whole "no sex work after the revolution" crowd is damn weird.

I get the whole concept that if everyone has needs met, they won't feel a need to engage in sex work. But sex can be a skill. And I'm not wasting my skill set by fucking for free in any economy.

2:44 PM · Jun 21, 2019 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

Source: <https://twitter.com/uppittynegress/status/1141899687559073793>

RIGHTS NOT RESCUE FOR MIGRANT SEX WORKERS

By LUCA STEVENSON. Originally published at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/rights-not-rescue-migrant-sex-workers/>



Sex workers march in London in March 2018

The sex workers' rights movement has, in the last few years, taken an unprecedented leap in visibility and recognition. Global organisations such as Amnesty International, the World Health Organization and the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association have publicly supported sex workers' rights. Prominent politicians such as the president of South Africa have called for decriminalisation. Particularly with regard to legal reform, the demands of sex workers have reached a tipping point.

Paradoxically, support has also increased for those who oppose sex workers' rights in the belief that they exacerbate gender inequality and lead to trafficking. This has been particularly true in the policy-making arena. Due to the well-funded advocacy of these abolitionist groups, political support for the 'Swedish model' (or Nordic model), which criminalises the clients of sex workers but not the sale of sex itself, has continued to grow.

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of Sweden's proclaimed flagship feminist law, which has, since 1999, taken root in many other parts of Europe and the world. Despite the negative impact of this law on sex workers, and particularly on migrant sex workers in an increasingly xenophobic Europe, Sweden and France are now united in promoting the model globally.

Resisting a model that punishes rather than protects

In the face of this abolitionist offensive, new sex worker collectives have sprung up alongside long-standing organisations to actively and vocally defend sex workers' interests. These interests can vary greatly. One effect of the movement's recent growth and diversification has been that we now know much more about the experiences and needs of some of the most marginalised sex workers in the world, such as migrant, black, trans, Roma and disabled sex workers. Conversations within the movement are now more nuanced and have moved well beyond the basic unifying slogans of 'Sex work is work'. Discussions on issues such as exploitation at work, repressive migration control, economic and gender inequality, homo- and transphobia, ableism, and racism are becoming integral parts of the sex workers' rights movement. These issues can impact sex workers every bit as much as the criminalisation of their work. This is nowhere more evident than in the intersecting issues and needs of migrant sex workers.

'Migrant sex worker' is an umbrella term that, in Europe, can include EU citizens from other member states with the legal right to live and work in any EU country; undocumented migrants without legal permission to stay and work; refugees and asylum

seekers; and potentially those who are currently classified as victims of trafficking. They are no monolithic group, and talking about them as such ignores the diversity and complexity of living and working conditions experienced by those who, due to personal choice, limited options, chance opportunity, or coercion, are selling sex outside their country of citizenship.

How do the needs of a Nigerian woman working the streets of Milan, a trans woman from Mexico advertising online in Barcelona, a Romanian mother in a 'pop-up brothel' in London, and a Syrian refugee boy selling sex to survive in a park in Athens compare? Too often, the criminalisation of sex work and migration combines with institutionalised racism and oppressive measures against issues like homelessness or trans identities to hit migrant sex workers in several ways at once. Their lives are marked by police repression, third party exploitation, fear of deportation, and wider human rights violations – a hostile environment that they seek to navigate with as much agency, courage and strength as they can muster. Migrant sex workers must provide for themselves and their families, and just like everyone else they try to improve their lives with the options available to them. However, these nuanced realities are rarely represented and acknowledged. The needs of migrant sex workers are instead neglected or ignored.

Rights not rescue

The International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (ICRSE) campaigns and organises to amplify the voices of migrant sex workers in Europe. Our network has developed resources such as briefing papers, policy briefs and films on the issues faced by migrant sex workers. We have also coordinated trainings and seminars to strengthen the capacities of migrant sex workers and to advocate for rights-based policies and laws. Now, with support from the Oak Foundation, we are proud to launch the 'RnR: Rights not Rescue' project. This new initiative, which will run through to the end of 2020, aims to empower migrant sex workers to fight trafficking and exploitation in the sex industry.

RnR seeks to involve sex workers in areas of policy-making from which they have historically been excluded. Inserting sex worker voices into the arenas of migration, anti-trafficking and gender equality is our highest priority, as is the development of a joint critical framework on these fields from the sex worker movement's perspective. Crucial questions have already been raised by migrant sex workers at the first meeting of the project. What constitutes decent work in sex work? How could the movement reimagine migration policies to improve the lives of asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants? How can sex workers mitigate the harmful effects of anti-trafficking measures? What sort of social and legal support could be offered to those suffering from exploitation and abuse? Over

the next two years we will seek to answer these and many other questions.

Throughout this project ICRSE will partner with open-Democracy/Beyond Trafficking and Slavery to offer a series of articles from sex workers' rights activists, researchers, and migrant and anti-trafficking advocates. These pieces will help educate readers, activists and policy-makers on the realities faced by migrant sex workers in Europe. They will share the latest evidence on the impact of criminalisation of sex work and migration and foster conversations on how to combat exploitation within the industry. ICRSE also hopes to move beyond the 'sex work is not trafficking' framing by problematising the trafficking framework itself, a largely unexplored topic in the sex worker movement.

For more details about the project, check the ICRSE website: www.sexworkeurope.org

WILLEM VAN SPRONSEN, ACTIVISM, AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

By ANNE RUSSELL. Originally published at <https://goodbyelittlefoxes.home.blog/2019/07/17/willem-van-spronsen-activism-and-domestic-violence/>

Content warning: This article contains discussions of intimate abuse, mental illness, and trauma.

I lay awake the other night thinking about Willem Van Spronsen, the 69-yr-old guy who police killed after he tried to firebomb the facilities that ICE use to transport migrants to concentration camps. He didn't kill or injure anyone in the process, just threatened to hinder their atrocities. His written manifesto was decent; his musical one was beautiful. I feel really sorry for his friends and comrades who are grieving, and for his children.

A report has come up that he was also a domestic abuser. His wife apparently received custody of their young child and four protection orders against him over the years from 2013-19.¹ For a white guy to have FOUR protection orders granted against him by the American police, it's reasonable to assume he's done some seriously bad things. (I genuinely love *Gone Girl* as much as the next psycho bitch, but it's a fantasy.) I doubt the protection orders were fake cos he was antifa either; 1) leftist abusers exist and 2) his wife wasn't a famous/rich/right-wing figure who the state would feel motivated to protect.

Whether or not Willem Van Spronsen was abusive though, we need frameworks for when a leftist becomes a martyr but is/was also a real piece of shit in some ways, because it happens all the time. I can imagine leftist abusers I know, cartoonishly cruel people who talk an alright political game, doing the same sort of direct action as Van Spronsen did—and many people in our scenes would be absolutely livid if they became posthumously sanctified by it. As many have said, certain types of direct action and violence (not that Van Spronsen's vandalism was violent)—even politically ethical and useful ones—often appeal to angry and desperate men of the Left who think they can justify treating others badly by invoking supposedly-radical politics. As though radical politics are the same as shouting, rather than finding whole new ways of being.

This doesn't say anything about the actions themselves. I think it's ethically fine and often tactically good to punch Nazis, and completely necessary to destroy their facilities. I don't think anyone who continues to work in or for a concentration camp is in-

nocent, and that the only way to bring better people around is by making it untenable for them to continue that work. But as I repeat ad nauseam & ennui, leftist scenes have to build up people who can pose a serious threat to fascists' safety while also being truly gentle to their loved ones. It's tiring trying to find new ways to say this when it keeps not happening, or happening too slowly. But it's not impossible. I know people like this, even men, who are worth their weight in gold.

All this work can be done without lionising Van Spronsen as an entire person. He did some good work of various kinds in his lifetime. He was a man (claims of him being a trans woman seem to be inaccurate), and in some ways it seems like he behaved like a Man.

Not lionising him is also part of recognising that, while individuals do matter, our movements are wholes. I'll never forget what a friend said, that "politics is what we do together; everything else is just survival strategies." Van Spronsen's friend said that his action was partly suicide by cop; not a survival strategy, but something he did to make some of his politics live on. People's actions can be motivated by politics, mental illness and their own power all at once. His work on the 13th was important. So is the nurturance his comrades and friends will need to give each other to heal, and to continue their activism. The work of helping his wife recover is important too.

In the early days of the internet, I find it hard to tell how contemporary martyrs or movement leaders are going to be remembered. Even when, for example, MLK isn't being whitewashed, his personal and political flaws have been hushed up by most historical discourses, even leftist ones, in favour of a figurehead. The internet makes it quicker for people's political flaws to be exposed (often by their own dumb tweets), but because power still exists it's hard to tell whether collective memory will remember them, or just their good stuff. I hope it remembers both.

I'm not telling people to not mourn Van Spronsen; people contain multitudes, and he reportedly did some good and kind things for many people. But I want people to realise that his victim has probably been mourning him for a long, long time. When someone you love turns out to be abusive, the pain is a lonelier grief than most; it can feel like the person you loved has died, but a copy of them still walks around telling everyone you're crazy (or "mentally unstable" for the more Enlightened ones) while using things you taught them as tools to manipulate other

¹ Source: King County Seattle Court records, accessed by the author of <https://heavy.com/news/2019/07/willem-van-spronsen-emma-durutti/>

people. Being disbelieved or dismissed by others brings its own grief too; at the loss of any naïvete you had about community apologia, and the friends and comrades who will distance themselves from you. Intrusive thoughts will often manifest as extraordinary levels of quiet rage, which is physically and psychologically debilitating but not often comforted or allayed, because that would require changing the usual order.

Honestly, all I originally wanted to do was post Van Spronsen's collection of quiet, peaceful, sad songs on Facebook, but I kept hearing "four protection orders" in my head. I wish things weren't like this. Maybe sometime down the line they won't be. I strongly believe that all people are born with the tendency to do good and to love well, but sometimes get lost one way or another. Acting decisively to stop harm, whether by shutting concentration camps or removing abusers from activist scenes until they make genuine reparations, is the only way to bring them back.

FEAR OF A FEMALE PLANET: GENDER, FEMINISM, AND ORGANIZED WORKING-CLASS STRUGGLE REVISITED

By JASMINA BRANKOVIC, June 3, 2014. Originally published at <http://www.hamptoninstitution.org/fear-of-a-female-planet.html>



When I initially embarked on the tumultuous trip into writing about the relationship between Marxism and feminism, little did I realize that I would delve deeply into my political home of decades past in order to make sense of the present political context in which many radical Left organizations are still exploring ways to make constructive connections between the seemingly conflicting strands of their revolutionary politics.

Marxist feminism was, for many years from the age of about 20, my political home. I may not identify as a Marxist today, but I maintain a great deal of respect for this substantial and important theoretical body, as it continues to inform my politics, my life, and my work. So I have been extremely saddened to see the ruptures in many Left organizations, which arose as a direct consequence of their tokenistic engagement with feminism. It is a revisited story, told one time too many, but one also worth repeating, for political, intellectual as well as moral reasons. For me, this is a deeply personal story, but I hold onto the fundamental dictum that the personal is also political.

The radical Left finds itself mired in quicksand, against the backdrop of the prevailing gender order. A number of organizations, some as high-profile as the Socialist Workers' Party in the UK, have seen allegations of sexual assault made only to be dismissed or undermined, and improperly investigated. The impression given by party hierarchies' responses to such claims discloses fears that the stories of women who are raped, sexually assaulted or harassed by party members disrupt the grandiose and offensively

phallogocentric idea of the party as a revolutionary vanguard whose fight on behalf of the working-class also includes the struggle for women's liberation. (In view of the mass hemorrhaging of the SWP membership since the 'crisis' broke, this is a fatally erroneous assumption.) Sexual harassment and assault are far from uncommon on the Left, and have been frequently undermined and disbelieved, much to the dismay both of the women who experience them, and the women and men who uphold the Left's claims supporting women's liberation and its feminist values.

I suggest in this article that what I call the 'old-school' Left can choose to sink into the quicksand. Or it can choose to deal with it differently. It can choose to accept that gender is a category of political analysis as relevant as that of class; it can choose to accept that the best way to show support for survivors of sexual offences is to accept their stories; it can choose to accept that it is the oppressed peoples who define their oppression. It can choose to take gender seriously.

I also suggest, perhaps implicitly, that we (where 'we' refers to the whole revolutionary Left, encompassing a broad spectrum of organizations and non-aligned activists) can only construct a unified front when (not if) gender relations and the theoretical undercurrent of 'women's liberation' (that is, feminism) feel at home on the radical Left, at organizational, political and intellectual levels. The 'we' includes the 'old-school' and any other school willing enough to listen. Revived socialist organizing around the segregational vectors of gender and class requires a mass-membership contribution in shaping the revolutionary platform for a truly transformative future towards full communism.

Marxism, Feminism, and the Issue of Gender

The role of gender in shaping individual and collective realities is frequently misunderstood and occasionally, misguidedly maligned on the radical left. While 'intersectionality' may be perceived to be the current buzzword that the 'old-school' has some difficulty grappling with, it is by no means a universally validated or accepted theoretical standpoint.

Marxism/socialism and many other radical 'isms' have forever promoted 'women's liberation', and have historically supported 'women's rights'. But 'women'

is not a synonym for 'gender'. Adoption of a gendered analysis is either poorly understood or contemptuously rejected by much of the old left circles as 'identity politics'. Most writings springing from the current crop of socialist organizations adopt the 'add-women-and-stir' approach, and this has only ever resulted in a convoluted analysis of women's oppression.

There are two specific examples from Australia, which illustrate very well the level of misunderstanding widespread on the Left: Socialist Alternative (SAlt)'s Louise O'Shea's response to the marches organized to protest violence against women, and Solidarity's Amy Thomas' more broader, but equally misguided, critique of 'the myth of male benefits'.

O'Shea argued that the expression of intense emotions around the well-publicized case of Jill Meagher's death¹ solely 'undercut class consciousness ... exactly why the mainstream media, police, local politicians and businesses got behind the "community" hype, as well as the Peace March and Reclaim the Night'. This article was discussed widely on the Australian Left, including a critical response from a now former member of SAlt.

While I am in agreement with the criticisms that were raised, I also argue that O'Shea's piece served as an attack on all feminist organizing around gendered street violence, including the Reclaim the Night tradition. It promotes a class-consciousness which implicitly excludes organizing against gendered street violence.

O'Shea is correct in stating that it is 'not women who are most at risk of being attacked on the street, as the hype around this case would suggest. Men die or are injured in random street violence far more frequently than women are or do ... Women are far, far more likely to be attacked or killed by people they know, are related to or are in relationships with, and this most commonly occurs in the home (86 per cent of murders and 93 per cent of sexual assaults).'

All the evidence supports this. However, what O'Shea fails to acknowledge is that gendered street violence, as well as domestic violence against women, entrench a patriarchal gender-order that subordinates women. Class is one hierarchical vector of a capitalist society; gender is another. Gender as a political category and a material means of social stratification functions in an intersectional relationship to class to maintain women's subordination.

Citing the Northern Territory intervention and the anti-Islamic fear-mongering following gang rapes committed by the Lebanese youths in Sydney, O'Shea notes that 'moral panics about crime or violence between individuals, in particular the need to protect white women and children from harm, are almost always used by governments to promote reactionary

ideas and to justify attacks on people's rights.' Her statement conflates feminist organizing with something quite different and erases and marginalizes the history of feminist organizing against gendered violence, including that of Reclaim the Night. While it is useful for the feminist movement to reflect on how protest against women's oppression can be manipulated and co-opted, it is highly dubious to suggest that spontaneous, mass protest against gendered violence can be simply reduced to a 'moral panic'.

Thomas's article deserves an equally strong critique. Thomas defines 'sexism' as 'the institutionalized discrimination against women [that] is reproduced by all the institutions of capitalist society-parliament, police, the courts, religion, the media.' Crucially, she argues that 'while many men hold sexist ideas, working class men do not in fact benefit from sexism-it is a weapon used by the capitalist class to get free domestic labor and to keep the working class divided and under control.' If 'sexism' is as institutionalized to the degree suggested, it is unclear as to how working-class men do not accrue its benefits. Although there are elements of sexism and gendered experience that serve to disadvantage both men and women (i.e. dividing the working class), being relatively better off is still a real, tangible benefit that concretely effects people's lives.

Thomas's reference to 'patriarchy theory' suggests that it is a key concept in contemporary feminism. Yet not only is 'patriarchy theory' simplistically described in this article, its use ignores the diversity of definitions of 'patriarchy' and ways of theorizing about it in the significantly fulsome body of feminist thought. There are as many theories of patriarchy as there are variants of 'feminism' today. Collapsing historical constructions of 'patriarchy' and subsuming the diversity of feminist thinking on the matter, is not only inaccurate, but is also intellectually and politically dishonest. But, more importantly, Thomas' analysis mistakenly universalizes 'men' and pays no attention to the concept of masculinity as an essential political category of a patriarchal gender order. In other words, gender in Thomas' article means 'men' and 'women' rather than the more sophisticated constructs such as masculinity and femininity, with material basis in their own right, and with highly politicized meanings.

Far more important are the implications of Thomas' analysis. Thomas attempts to address the concept of 'male advantage' but without the requisite rigor. Male privilege is a concept initially coined by feminist theorists like Peggy McIntosh to describe the corollary of 'women's disadvantage', that is the advantage men gain from women's disadvantage. McIntosh acknowledges that men benefit from sexism in ways that are not always the result of conscious oppression – but benefit nevertheless they do. Laurie Penny's argument is of relevance here: 'What we don't say is: of course not all men hate women. But culture hates women, so men who grow up in a sexist culture have a tendency to do and say sexist things, often without

1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder_of_Jill_Meagher

meaning to.' Or, in other words, it is the dominant masculine culture that subordinates women, and one which constructs oppressive norms demanding the conformity of all genders, in which all men are unavoidably involved as the dominant gender. Denying 'male privilege' amounts to a denial of women's gendered experience of oppression in all classes, including the working class. Invariably, this denial negates the stated purpose of Solidarity's own goal in forging a 'unified front' against capitalism.

Although Thomas acknowledges the horror of domestic violence, she conflates gendered violence with other forms of violence when she states that 'men are also responsible for the majority of violence against other men.' This works to conceal the way in which gendered violence keeps women subordinated to men and reinforces the structural, material dimensions of a patriarchal gender order.

None of what I have written diminishes the point Thomas makes about the working-class men's relative powerlessness and subordination vis-a-vis men of the bourgeois classes. None of this diminishes the fact that a woman happens to be one of the most exploitative capitalists in Australia! But to fail to recognize that the working-class has a gendered dimension will do little to organize more working-class women or undermine the current gender-order, in a joint struggle against patriarchy and capitalism.

Gender and Class: Implications for Radical Organizing

Concealing gendered experiences and the way these should inform radical politics, ultimately only works to the detriment of cementing both sophisticated understandings of class and the collective nature of radical struggle. Radical movements splinter, in part, because of the divisiveness that arises out of the refusal to acknowledge gendered experiences and their material realities. History demonstrates this and it would be prudent to listen to its lessons.

Perhaps most notably, the emergence of the 1960s Women's Movement was as much a response to misogyny of the male-dominated New Left, as it was a response to the increased educational opportunities opening to many (relatively privileged, white, able-bodied) women. This is not to uncritically extol all of feminist thought. My own view reflects bell hooks':

"Feminist consciousness-raising has not significantly pushed women in the direction of revolutionary politics. For the most part, it has not helped women understand capitalism- how it works as a system that exploits female labor and its interconnections with sexist oppression It has not shown women how we benefit from the exploitation and oppression of women and men globally

or shown us ways to oppose imperialism. Most importantly, it has not continually confronted women with the understanding that the feminist movement to end sexist oppression can be successful only if we are committed to revolution, to the establishment of a new social order." (bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*)

One effect of such splintering was the failure of the radical left to pose a functional challenge to capitalism. This is evident in the neo-liberal hegemony that emerged as a response to the stifling of 60s' radicalism.

Class is not the sole determinant in a materialist analysis of the functioning of the wage economy. Just as class is an objective, structural, expression of the capitalist mode of production, with the ownership of the means of production at the centre, so is gender an equally objective, structural expression of patriarchal relations, with the ownership of the means of reproduction at the centre. The 'means of reproduction' theory goes beyond the confines of gender, but its key contribution is in feminist analysis exemplified by the work of Silvia Federici. She eloquently notes:

When I speak of reproduction, I don't speak only in the sense of procreation, although that is part of it, but of all the activities necessary for the reproduction of human life-from housework to subsistence agriculture, to the production of culture and care for the environment.

A Marxist feminist tradition has articulated materialist accounts of the interactions between patriarchy and capitalism. Key works of Marxist and socialist feminists – such as Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*, Sylvia Walby's *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*, Sheila Rowbotham's *Beyond the Fragments* – should be rescued from the 'enormous condescension of posterity' (to borrow from E.P. Thompson).

I would venture even further: the false and unhelpful binary division between materialist accounts, and those interested in subjectivity, is rather unhelpful. As Judith Butler, one of those deplorable 'identity feminists', wrote: 'Something besides theory must take place, such as interventions at social and political levels, sustained labor, and institutionalized practice, which are not quite the same as exercise of theory'. The importance of materialist perspectives lies in encouraging these sorts of interventions, which in turn heighten consciousness and strengthen identity – including working-class identity. In other words, to quote bell hooks once more, 'there must exist a paradigm, a practical model for social change that includes an understanding of ways to transform consciousness that are linked to efforts to transform structures.' This I believe to be our biggest challenge.

NEITHER FEMOCRATS NOR FASCISTS?

Review of *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* by Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser (<https://www.versobooks.com/books/2924-feminism-for-the-99>)

By DAPHNE LAWLESS

When Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya and Nancy Fraser announce that their “manifesto”, *Feminism for the 99%*, is consciously inspired by perhaps the most famous Manifesto of our time – Marx and Engels’ *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (582)¹ – you can only applaud their ambition. Certainly, one of the (few) hopeful features of the global radical scene today is how many women, queer and gender-queer authors and analysts are standing up to offer new thinking and possible ways out of the impasse into which our movement has sunk, in the twilight of neoliberalism and the era of Trump and Brexit.

This short book is divided into the “Manifesto” proper, and a “Postface” which goes into more detail about the intellectual basis upon which their authors make their political proposals. The authors set themselves the task of combining modern “intersectional” feminism with Marxist political economy – a necessary task in the modern era, which they sum up as follows:

As feminists, we appreciate that capitalism is not just an economic system, but something larger: an institutionalized social order that also encompasses the apparently “noneconomic” relations and practices that sustain the official economy. (619)

The roots of their analysis lie in Social Reproduction Theory. The authors use an excellent turn of phrase to sum up the division that this theory makes between the two spheres of work in capitalist society: “profit-making and people-making work” (230). “People-making” work (aka social reproduction) includes housework, care for children, the sick or the elderly, emotional labour, and all the other little things which go together to make life under capitalism (barely) liveable. The great trick of capitalism as an economic system is that capitalists *only pay for profit-making work*, and that for less value than it creates; families and individuals are stuck with the responsibility and the costs for performing essential people-making work (excluding some meagre support in countries with a welfare state). The authors rehearse the analysis of the Marxist tradition, starting with Engels, that capitalism deliberately encourages gender oppression and the institution of the patriarchal nuclear family, which combine to keep women docile and isolated, thus ensuring a continual supply of unpaid peo-

ple-making work.

The crucial advance the authors make is to argue that, since people-making work is as vital to the survival of capitalism as profit-making work, that the weapon of the *strike* – workers withdrawing their labour – is potentially as powerful in the people-making sphere of society as it is in the profit-making sphere, and even more so in the current neoliberal era where workers’ organisation at the point of production has been so run down. They point to two major “Women’s Strike” waves in different part of the world – a Polish women’s strike against that country’s laws against abortion, and an Argentinian women’s strike against a court ruling acquitting two men of the rape and murder of a teenage girl (75) – which later linked up as part of an “International Women’s Strike” on International Women’s Day, 2017. It was working on this very strike which brought the three authors of the book together (607).

The authors point to this phenomenon as not only an extension of the strike weapon into the people-making sphere of society, but its *reinvention* in a new context:

... this burgeoning movement has invented *new ways to strike* and infused the strike form itself with a *new kind of politics*. By coupling the withdrawal of labor with marches, demonstrations, small business closures, blockades, and boycotts, the movement is replenishing the repertoire of strike actions, once large but dramatically shrunk by a decades-long neoliberal offensive. At the same time, this new wave is democratizing strikes and expanding their scope – above all, by broadening the very idea of what counts as “labor”. (91)

The authors are very clear that the idea of a “women’s” or “feminist” strike is not a new form of the separatist-feminist politics of the 1980s.

Not only women and gender-nonconforming people, but also men have joined the movement’s massive demonstrations against the defunding of schools, health care, housing, transport, and environmental protections... Feminist strikes are thus becoming the catalyst and model for broad-based efforts to defend our communities. (116)

...strikes belong to the working class *as a whole* – not to a partial stratum of it, nor to particular organizations. (802)

1 References are made to Kindle locations in the e-book edition.

The Manifesto proper is divided into eleven “Theses” which mark out an explicitly intersectional approach. “Feminism for the 99%” is, the authors say, not only essentially anti-capitalist, but internationalist, anti-racist, and ecosocialist. They draw a very convincing parallel between the exploitation of women’s unpaid “people-making” work and the dispossession of indigenous people: “the racialized expropriation of unfree or dependent peoples has served ever since as a hidden enabling condition for the profitable exploitation of ‘free labor’” (433). And this is in turn paralleled by the ransacking and degradation of the global environmental “commons”:

women occupy the front lines of the present ecological crisis... [and] are also at the forefront of struggles against it... women model new, integrated forms of struggle that challenge the tendency of mainstream environmentalists to frame the defense of “nature” and the material well-being of human communities as mutually antithetical. (470–488)

One of the authors’ sharpest criticisms of neoliberal feminism is the observation that privileged women in the Global North have only managed to liberate themselves from the social obligation to provide unpaid people-making work by passing the burden down a “global care chain” (758). Their relative economic success allows them to pay for women from the Global South to take up this labour as nannies, cleaners and carers – to the extent that some Southern countries, at the behest of the IMF and similar institutions, have made an explicit policy of sending women overseas to perform such labour, thus depriving their own communities of carers. “The overall result is a new, *dualized* organization of social reproduction, commodified for those who can pay for it and privatized for those who cannot” (766). The Global North not only *imports* women’s care work, but *exports* women’s oppression – as in the Export Processing Zones of northern Mexico, whose mainly female workforce is disciplined in part by sexual violence (332).

Critique

One very curious omission is that the book makes no reference to sex work or sex workers. This omission is particularly puzzling given that sex workers were a vital part of the International Women’s Strike which brought the authors together.² The book’s existing analysis of “global care chains” could easily be expanded to deal with women lured (or trafficked) to the advanced countries to perform commodified sexual labour, and it would be good to hear the authors comment on this.

2 <https://www.redpepper.org.uk/on-international-womens-day-sex-workers-are-going-on-strike/>

A more serious weakness of the book in the sense of practical politics is the apparent drawing of an equivalence between “reactionary populism” and “progressive neoliberalism”, as the twin enemies against whom this new movement is to be built. There seems to be a clear disconnect in the *Manifesto* between its very convincing Marxist-feminist analysis and its political appeal to a language of (Left-wing) populism. The very turn of phrase, “the 99%” (which came out of the Occupy movement at the start of this decade) indicates a populist rather than a class analysis, appealing to “anti-elite” sentiment while deliberately glossing over precisely who the “1%” are. When this slogan is taken up by the populist Right, it is re-directed against the “fancy” lifestyle habits of the urbanized, professional middle-class rather than the real culprit of our misery, global capitalism and the class which embodies it – or against a fictitious conspiracy of ethnic, political or sexual Others (historically Jews, more recently “cultural marxists”) who are believed to have seized control.

One example of this is the authors’ acceptance of the argument of Right-wing populists, and their fellow travellers on the “alt-left”, that Donald Trump is now the President of the United States because “Hillary Clinton failed to excite women voters” (51). This is an extremely tendentious reading of the 2016 election, which Clinton would have won by a clear margin if the United States elected its President by global standards of democracy. This analysis also neglects the fact that, according to exit polling, 52% of white women who voted in the 2016 US presidential voted for Trump, the “pussy-grabbing” candidate of white supremacy and misogyny – compared to an overwhelming vote for Clinton by women of other ethnicities.³ These white women seem to have been made “excited” by Trump’s outright racism, and there is no indication that (for example) the gender- and race-blind social democracy of Bernie Sanders would have appealed any more to this demographic than Clinton’s promise of a continuation of the Obama era.

It is distressing in this context that the authors use “anti-elitist” tropes which are clearly associated with right-wing attacks on the Clinton campaign, such as dismissive mentions of “pant suits” (139) or even “brunches” (78).⁴ The authors have every right and justification to criticize the politics of what they call “femocrats” – the Sheryl Sandbergs (and yes, the Hillary Clintons, or even the Jacinda Arderns) of this world who simply want more women to get ahead under capitalism. But a glib repetition of slogans which have become the property of Right-populism,

3 Other polling analysis has cast doubt on whether the 52% figure is accurate, but still comes up with a preference by white women voters for Trump over Clinton: see <http://time.com/5422644/trump-white-women-2016/>

4 See an interesting article suggesting that using “brunch” as a target of political derision is in itself misogynistic: <https://www.glam.com/lifestyle/reasons-to-love-brunch/>

by people arguing for a Left political project, seems, in the current conjuncture, both lazy and dangerous. It does not clearly distinguish between working-class opposition to the hollowness of neoliberalism's promises of gender equality and diversity, and Right-populist opposition to those very concepts. The authors themselves recognize this danger when they discuss "those currents of left-wing parties in Europe that propose to 'co-opt' the Right by themselves opposing immigration" (414). What can we then say about co-opting the language of the Right's culture war, sneering at "pant suits", "brunch" and other cultural markers of professional women, rather than their actual privilege? It seems particularly strange in a context where the authors praise the success of the #MeToo movement, which began among women working in Hollywood – a middle-class, professional layer (332).

The danger of a one-sided emphasis on condemnation of liberal hypocrisy is shown when the authors discuss what rights women currently have under progressive neoliberalism:

The only way that women and gender non-conforming people can actualize the rights they have on paper or might still win is by transforming the underlying social system that hollows out rights. By itself, legal abortion does little for poor and working-class women who have neither the means to pay for it nor access to clinics that provide it... laws criminalizing gender violence are a cruel hoax if they turn a blind eye to the structural sexism and racism of criminal justice systems. (150)

From Marx onward, socialists' opposition to the rhetoric of bourgeois democracy and human rights has been that these promises are but a shadow of what real liberation would be like. But that cannot allow us to believe that bourgeois democracy and rights mean *nothing*. Just because abortion rights in the United States are *de facto* restricted (financially as well as by local reactionary laws) doesn't mean that it is a matter of indifference as to whether the Supreme Court, including one Trump appointee who has been credibly accused of sexual assault as a young man, overturns the *Roe v. Wade* decision and thus abolishes that bourgeois right altogether.

To describe bourgeois democracy and rights as a "cruel hoax" does not seem to take seriously what would happen to women and the gender-queer in a world where such laws and rights were swept away, or where the bourgeois establishment stopped even pretending to uphold them. One possible answer can be seen before our eyes in Putin's Russia. The replacement of progressive neoliberalism with reactionary populism or fascism is not a matter of indifference to the most vulnerable workers. It has been previously noted that the leading voices who put the critique of progressive neoliberalism ahead of hard opposition to

Right-populism – what Idrees Ahmad calls the "alt-left"⁵ – are white (mainly male) media professionals, the kind of people who are not only not the first targets of fascism, but if they are smart and/or cynical enough, may be able to make a good living as regime publicists⁶.

Although the authors are correct that we have to build a movement which fights "reactionary populism but also its progressive neoliberal opponents" (193), we cannot be indifferent between these two evils here and now – especially when our own forces are so weak. The authors proclaim: "We reject not only reactionary populism but also progressive neoliberalism. In fact, it is by splitting both these alliances that we intend to build our movement" (542). The question of who "we" is in this paragraph is an important one. It presupposes an anti-capitalist, pro-democracy global movement which has sufficient social weight to fight both these evils. It is imperative to *build* this movement, independent of and critical of progressive neoliberalism – but the support shown by (at least) a plurality of white women voters in the United States for the Trump movement shows how difficult it will be to "separate working-class communities from the forces promoting militarism, xenophobia and ethnonationalism" (552)⁷. Note the problematic formation here – the section of the working-class which (in Western countries) either active or passively supports reactionary politics are overwhelmingly *white*. The black and Latinx working class did not vote for Trump, and neither did black or Latina women. Racist ideas will destroy any working-class or feminist movement, and they don't go away simply by blaming the progressive liberals for not fighting them hard enough. The fate of socialists in Britain who thought they could "piggyback" on the momentum of the Right-populist Brexit movement, to shift it in a socialist-international direction, should be a warning for everyone.

Conclusion

Arruzza, Bhattacharya and Fraser stake out a convincing claim for a revolutionary socialist, internationalist and

5 <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/comment/2017/8/25/the-alt-left-is-real-and-its-helping-fascists>

6 It is interesting that this Manifesto has been published by Verso Books, who have come under fire from many leftists and liberals for publishing authors who apologise for right-wing authoritarianism and populism – for example, Max Blumenthal, a propagandist for authoritarian but "anti-imperialist" posing regimes such as Syria or Nicaragua (see https://twitter.com/im_PULSE/status/1113640209516781568). As Marxists and therefore materialists, we must critically interrogate whose voices get amplified by professional publishers and institutions, and what the material incentives behind such decisions are – even on the self-described "Left".

7 Dutch author Flavia Dzodan's exposé of "alt-right feminism" is worth reading in this context: <https://medium.com/this-political-woman/alt-feminism-and-the-white-nationalist-women-who-love-it-f8ee20cd30d9>

anti-racist feminism which rejects both right-wing populism and the “progressive” wing of neoliberalism. But it seems necessary to emphasise that, at this point in history, it is the former who are in ascendancy and the latter who are on the defensive. It is certainly easier to turn a mass of excluded, despairing workers and poor people against this class of managers and privileged workers than against an abstract global “system”; but this is precisely what the populist Right and its fascist fringe is doing right now

The authors are correct that “a crisis... is also a moment of political awakening and an opportunity for social transformation” (194). It is also, as we have seen, an opportunity for all manner of fascist and fascist-like monsters to crawl out of the gutters of history, to attack the very ideas of diversity and equality to which progressive liberals pay lip-service. Thus, the Left cannot hope to cynically reuse the Right’s attack lines for our own ends. We have to promote a message of *fulfilling the promises* of progressive liberalism, opposing their hollowing-out by neoliberal economics; not treat the femocrats and the fascists as if they were no different. Thankfully, the authors’ call for the reinvention of the tactic of the mass strike for the 21st century, extending it into the “people-making” sectors of society, is a cogent and intelligent one, which will hopefully be taken up by the broader radical Left.

WHAT IS FIGHTBACK?

Fightback is a trans-Tasman socialist media project with a magazine, a website, and other platforms. We believe that a structural analysis is vital in the task of winning a world of equality and plenty for all. Capitalism, our current socio-economic system, is not only exploiting people and planet – but is designed to operate this way. Therefore we advocate a total break with the current system to be replaced by one designed and run collectively based on principles of freedom, mutual aid, and social need.

Fightback is a trans-Tasman organization, operating in Aotearoa and Australia. In the modern era of free movement across the Tasman, “Australasia” is becoming a reality in a way it has not been since the 19th century. So many New Zealanders (tauwiwi as well as tangata whenua) now live and work in Australia – and decisions made in one country increasingly impact the other, as the inter-governmental controversy surrounding the Manus Island detention camp shows.

We wish to engage socialists from both sides of the Tasman – in particular, socialists from Aotearoa living and working in Australia – to continue the lines of analysis and directions of organisation which we have been pursuing. Beyond the dogmas of “sect Marxism”; beyond national boundaries; towards a genuinely decolonised, democratic, feminist and queer-friendly anti-capitalism.

We recognise that capitalism was imposed in Aotearoa and Australia through colonisation. While we draw substantially on European whakapapa and intellectual traditions, we seek to break the unity of the European colonial project, in favour of collective self-determination and partnership between tangata whenua and tauwiwi. We recognise that this must be a learning process.

While we draw inspiration and lessons from history, theoretical agreement on past revolutions is not the basis for our unity. Rather, we unify around a common programme for transformation here and now.

Our 10-Point Programme

Fightback stands for the following core programme, and for building institutions of grassroots power in the working class and oppressed groups to bring them about:

1. **Constitutional transformation** based on indigenous self-determination and workers power. Indigenous and worker co-ops to operate as guardians over public resources.
2. **Secure, appropriate and meaningful work** for those who want it, with a shorter working week. The benefit system to be supplemented with a Universal Basic Income, removal of punitive sanctions.
3. **International working-class solidarity.** Close the Detention Centres. Open borders to Australia and Aotearoa, full rights for migrant workers. Recognise Pasefika rights to self-determination, Australia and Aotearoa to contribute to a 'no-strings' development fund for Pacific nations. Opposition to all imperialist ventures and alliances; neither Washington nor Moscow.
4. **No revolution without women's liberation.** Full funding for appropriate, community-driven abuse prevention and survivor support, free access to all reproductive technologies, public responsibility for childcare and other reproductive work. The right to full, safe expression of sexuality and gender identity.
5. **An ecosocialist solution** to climate change. End fossil fuel extraction, expand green technology and public transport, and radically restructure industrial food production.
6. **Freedom of information.** End corporate copyright policies in favour of creative commons. Public support for all media technologies, expansion of affordable broadband internet to the whole country. An end to government spying.
7. **Abolish prisons,** replace with restorative justice and rehabilitation.
8. **Universal right to housing.** Expansion of high-density, high-quality public housing, strict price controls on privately owned houses. Targeted support to end involuntary homelessness.
9. **Fully-funded healthcare** at every level. Move towards health system based on informed consent, remove inequities in accident compensation, opposition to "top-down" efforts to change working people's behaviour.
10. **Fully-funded education** at every level, run by staff and students. Funding for all forms of education and research, enshrining indigenous knowledge as a core part of the curriculum.

More detail on this programme is available in our pamphlet What is Fightback?